

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Two-way asymmetrical communication mediating internal communication and employee engagement

Kavitha Balakrishnan^{1*}, Ajitha Angusamy², Muhammad Danial Rezza Rosli¹

¹ Faculty of Applied Communication, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya 63100, Malaysia

² Faculty of Business, Multimedia University, Melaka 75450, Malaysia

* Corresponding author: Kavitha Balakrishnan, kavitha.balakrishnan@mmu.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between employee engagement with internal communication factors in the context of a prominent e-commerce company in Malaysia. The study employed a quantitative data approach, utilising a simple random sampling method. Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires were administered to 255 respondents representing various departments within the e-commerce company, including finance, sales and marketing, operations management, human resources, and IT. The study's outcomes demonstrated a significantly positive relationship between communication climate and employee engagement, which is critical for retaining employee commitment. The study's findings confirmed a positive relationship between organisation communication and employee engagement, which promotes engagement. However, two-way asymmetrical communication showed negative effects when analysed for the mediating role. These findings underscore the importance of effective internal communication in organisations, especially within the context of a leading e-commerce company. Additionally, they should be aware of the potential negative consequences of asymmetrical communication and strive for more balanced and ethical communication practices. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by bridging the gap in scientific research on the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement, particularly in the Malaysian context. By drawing on stakeholders' and relationship management theories, this research provides valuable insights into the theoretical foundations of this relationship, confirming the relevance of these theories in the organisational setting.

Keywords: communication climate; employee engagement; internal communication; leadership communication; performance

1. Introduction

Malaysia's online retail sales surged by 20.5% in the year 2022, based on the Department of Statistics, Malaysia^[1]. The leading players of online shopping platforms are multinational technology e-commerce companies. One of the most popular e-commerce companies is Shopee in Malaysia^[2] and Southeast Asia, as reported in a survey conducted by Malaysia eCommerce^[3]. Internal communication is crucial for efficiency and success^[4]; it serves as an invaluable mechanism for fostering loyalty and trust among employees, which in turn builds strong employee engagement^[5,6]. When strategically incorporated into organisational management, effective internal communication becomes essential for achieving stronger financial

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 8 September 2023 | Accepted: 26 September 2023 | Available online: 21 December 2023

CITATION

Balakrishnan K, Angusamy A, Rosli MDR. Two-way asymmetrical communication mediating internal communication and employee engagement. *Environment and Social Psychology* 2024; 9(2): 2074. doi: 10.54517/esp.v9i2.2074

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2023 by author(s). *Environment and Social Psychology* is published by Asia Pacific Academy of Science Pte. Ltd. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

performance and global market competitiveness^[7]. Hence, this study examined the relationship between internal communication from the perspective of Stakeholders and Relationship Management Theory and employee engagement.

Organisational reputation and success can be enhanced when employers pay attention to the work environment, work engagement, and internal communication^[8]. Good internal communication between one employee and another is an essential tool in achieving productivity and maintaining strong working relationships at all levels of an organisation^[9]. Although Sun et al.^[7] emphasized the critical part that communication plays in raising employee engagement, there hasn't been much empirical study done on how these two aspects interrelate.

Undesirable outcomes of disengagement are negative job attitudes, lack of teamwork, and low work productivity^[10]. A study on the relationship between internal communication in Malaysia indicated that employee engagement rapidly decreases due to poor organisational communication^[6]. The study stated a lack of related studies to understand further the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement, especially in Malaysia, and future academic research to expand their study to a more extensive testing scale. On the other hand, most studies in this area involve corporate organisations in countries like Canada, South Africa, and India^[7,11–13]. However, there is limited study in Malaysia that investigates the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement, and communication in multicultural organisations in Malaysia can be even more complex and challenging^[14,15]. Hence, this study was set to examine internal communication and employee engagement in one of Malaysia's growing industries of multinational technology e-commerce companies.

While internal communication and employee engagement are becoming increasingly important in contemporary organisational settings, there is still a substantial lack in the empirical literature regarding how they interact, particularly in the Malaysian context and more specifically within the expanding multinational technology e-commerce sector. The majority of the research that is now available is based on studies done in various nations, including Southeast Asia, South Africa, Canada, and South Africa^[5,7]. This spatial disparity emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive empirical studies that are customized to the organisational context of Malaysia. The literature study also shows that there aren't many studies addressing these links within the distinctive dynamics of Malaysia's multicultural organisations because the majority of the research in this area focuses on corporate organisations^[14,15]. The complexity introduced by this cultural and contextual variation is not sufficiently addressed in the existing research. By offering empirical insights into the complex relationship between internal communication and employee engagement and highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the multicultural organisational context in Malaysia's multinational technology e-commerce sector, this study aims to close these gaps.

1.1. Research questions

To understand the association between internal communication and employee engagement, the following research questions were formulated:

- a) What is the relationship between internal communication factors and employee engagement?
- b) What is the role of leadership communication in the relationship between internal communication factors and employee engagement?

1.2. Research objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- examine the relationship between internal communication factors and employee engagement.
- investigate the role of two-way asymmetrical communication in the relationship between internal

communication factors and employee engagement.

2. Literature review

2.1. Internal communication

Internal communication is characterised as the informal and structured knowledge-sharing between management and employees^[16]. Although internal communication research spans over a few decades, it has undergone several organisational changes recently. Employees now look for additional attributes in a workplace besides their salary and other benefits, such as good communication^[17]. They want to believe that what they do every day has made a difference. Strategic communication extends beyond announcing birthdays, and monthly newsletters, integrating all communication messages and encouraging the content internally. Therefore, the variables for internal communication need to be extended to cover the depth that modern organisations now demand.

According to Freeman^[18], stakeholder theory encourages a practical and efficient way to manage an organisation in a highly complex work environment. It is efficient because stakeholders that are treated well will try to repay the treatment they get with positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation, such as sharing information or working hard and remaining loyal to the organisation even in difficult times. Based on stakeholder theory, the creation and preservation of relationships between an organisation and employees can be accomplished through internal communication. According to this theory, businesses can effectively manage their stakeholder relationships by providing them with a great experience. This encourages positive behaviors and attitudes including information sharing and unwavering loyalty^[6,7]. Likewise, de Beer and Rensburg^[19] stated that the theory of relationship management principles emphasises the management of organisational-public relationships to support organisations and the public. The study claimed the success of an organisation in achieving its targets is primarily influenced by the relationship between its key stakeholders, and the employees. Besides, relationship management theory shifts the focus of public relations from communication to relationships, with communication acting as a tool in maintaining organisation-public relationships. The constructs of internal communication reviewed in this study are communication climate, quality and reliability of the information, leadership communication and two-way symmetrical communication, whereas two-way asymmetrical communication is assessed as a mediator^[5,6].

2.2. Employee engagement

Engaged workers are described as inspired, self-improving and efficient^[20] while understanding and aligning themselves with their company's culture and business strategy. Employees have an innate desire to volunteer and show effort in their work, and organisations should identify effective methods of evaluating employee engagement and job satisfaction. Employee engagement influences positive employee communication behaviors and minimizes turnover intentions, which are both related to internal communication management. Employees who make this extra effort often show positive attributes at their workplace: trustworthiness, collaboration, perseverance, respect, performance, motivation, diligence, and insightfulness. Therefore, employee engagement goes beyond employee satisfaction, and conventional satisfaction metrics need to be revised to include employee engagement scales^[20]. With the introduction of employee engagement, some of the variables for measuring effective internal communication include trust, credibility, organisational goals, identification, internal and external alignment, accuracy, openness, transparency, timeliness, receiver relevance, communication channels, and message management.

According to social exchange theory, organisations form the foundation for transactions. The principle of social interaction is one of the most authoritative principles that allows the interpretation of behaviour in the

workplace^[21]. Theorists accept that this requires a sequence of interdependent encounters to establish social exchange responsibilities for the interacting parties. Cropanzano et al.^[21] also claimed that there is the potential for interactions between employers and employees to create high-quality relationships, negotiate context and interpret the objective of employee engagement. Internal communication is integral to internal public relations with links to positive employee outcomes such as employee engagement^[22]. Employee engagement is a factor that contributes positively to employee productivity and organisational effectiveness^[23]. Employee engagement has been associated to characteristics like job satisfaction, work involvement, and organisational commitment, and its core constructs include vigor, dedication, and absorption^[5-7].

2.3. Conceptual framework

The research objectives and research questions of this study lead to the research model (**Figure 1**). The following section discusses the hypotheses construction based on the relationships between the constructs as shown in the research model.

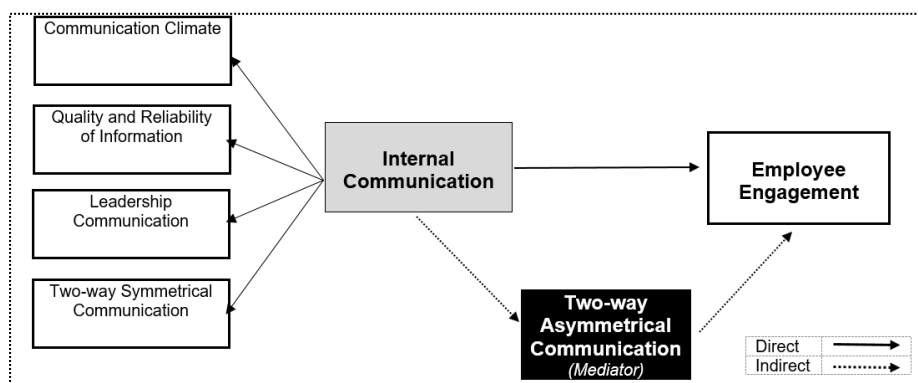


Figure 1. Research model.

2.4. Hypotheses construction

Communication climate is characterised as the subjectively experienced nature of the internal atmosphere of a business that covers the key cluster of inferred predisposition recognisable through the reports of members' perceptions of messages and message-related activities taking place in the organisation^[24]. Communication climate includes only communicative phenomena that are much different from organisational climate. Jaupi and Llaci^[25] stated that employees become worried about the future of their organisation and will start thinking about leaving when they feel the absence of consistent and honest communication within the organisation. Durkin also stated that organisations should communicate and share with all the employees about their vision and values to go beyond just making profits. Building on insights from Jaupi and Llaci^[25], this hypothesis posits that a positive communication climate enhances employee engagement by fostering trust and commitment within the organisation^[6,26]. Hence, hypothesis (H1a) is formulated.

H1a: Communication climate has a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement.

The quality and reliability of information are identified as communication environment attributes that employees use when they understand the communication climate within their organisations. Karanges et al.^[22] defines the quality of information as an understanding by individual employees of the importance of the information they collect. The reliability of information is determined by the trustworthiness of the sender and channel used^[11], which affects organisational effectiveness, employee engagement, and motivation. If employees do not trust the information or its source, they will depend on their colleagues to provide credible information. Drawing from Karanges et al.^[22] and Mbhele^[11] and supported by Nguyen and Ha^[26], it is hypothesized that high-quality and reliable information positively influences employee engagement by

bolstering trust and motivation^[6,7]. Hence, hypothesis (H1b) is formulated.

H1b: Quality and reliability of information has a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement.

Willacy^[27] implies that two-way symmetrical communication is like a dialogue in which persuasion goes both ways, and success is determined by the understanding gained by both parties, not necessarily on opinions that were changed in the process. Symmetric communication encourages interactions, and the goal of symmetrical communication is mutual gain rather than influence^[27]. This communication style seeks to create a win-win situation between the employers and employees^[11]; employees are more engaged and feel a sense of belonging to the organisation. In alignment with Willacy's perspective as supported by Men et al.^[5] and Nguyen and Ha^[26], this hypothesis posits that two-way symmetrical communication creates a win-win situation, enhancing employee engagement and a sense of belonging within the organisation^[6,7]. Thus, hypothesis (H1c) is formulated.

H1c: Two-way symmetrical communication has a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement.

Leaders essentially guide, coach, lead, direct, and motivate^[11], and leaders form the relationship between an individual and a large group that shares the same goal or common interest. This implies that leaders of any organisation or group must possess good communication skills to create a better understanding and trust that inspire others. In this study, leadership refers to those in higher management like managers and supervisors who instruct, direct, and convince their team to work towards the organisation's vision and mission. Leadership communication is important to understand the needs of employees and create a harmonious working environment^[28]. Good employee engagement also helps leaders promote communication and interaction opportunities and develop a sense of belonging between the employees and the organisation. As leaders play a pivotal role in creating understanding and trust^[5,26], it is hypothesized that effective leadership communication fosters employee engagement and a harmonious working environment^[6,7]. Therefore, hypothesis (H1d) is formed.

H1d: Leadership communication has a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement.

Two-way asymmetrical communication targets the audience through specific research but still aims to persuade them^[27]. Asymmetrical communication is used to persuade and influence but limits the sense of responsibility. Two-way asymmetrical communication prioritises an organisation's needs rather than employees. This type of communication is assumed to harm the level of employee engagement^[6,7,11]. Hence, the following set of H2 (a, b, c & d) hypotheses, H3 and H4, are proposed.

H2a: Communication climate has a negative and significant relationship with two-way asymmetrical communication.

H2b: Quality and reliability of information has a negative and significant relationship with two-way asymmetrical communication.

H2c: Two-way symmetrical communication has a negative and significant relationship with two-way asymmetrical communication.

H2d: Leadership communication has a negative and significant relationship with two-way asymmetrical communication.

H3: Two-way asymmetrical communication has a negative and significant relationship with employee engagement.

H4: Two-way asymmetrical communication mediates the relationship between internal communication constructs and employee engagement.

3. Methodology

The methodology focuses on the research process, equipment and course of action employed in a research study^[29]. In this study, researchers will use a quantitative approach that involves the collection of details through questionnaires which can be used to gain numerical statistics for accurate information and analysis. According to Queirós et al.^[30], quantitative methodology seeks to obtain accurate and reliable measurements that allow statistical analysis.

The selection of participants of this study are employees of Shopee Malaysia. The study aims to better collect employees' perspectives from different departments to understand the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement. The probability sampling technique uses statistical methods in selecting a group of people from a large population, and it is a reasonable method to make generalisations from the results^[31]. The study's main objective is to generalise its findings rather than choosing exceptional examples, specialised populations, or conducting in-depth research. As a result, the participants can be chosen at random, and the study used simple random sampling, one of the best ways of assembling the sample who are representatives of the population^[31]. Employees from different departments were approached to participate in the study. The sample size is the number of participants required to be confident at a particular level that we would observe the number of events desired^[32]. The sample size was decided based on G*Power^[33], which helps researchers calculate the sample size when conducting research. G*Power calculates the sample size necessary to perform the study with sufficient statistical power to find important correlations or effects by entering the values for the study's design. By inputting the parameters for α , expected effect size (f^2), and desired power ($1 - \beta$), G*Power calculates the required sample size necessary to achieve the desired statistical power for the specified effect size and significance level. These values are essential for the software to calculate the required sample size which was established as 138. Approximately 50 employees from each of the five departments were randomly selected for data collection procedures.

The major approach for gathering data for the study was online. In compliance with all ethical research procedures, the company's human resources department was contacted to get further details about the employees in each department, including their names, cell phone numbers, and email addresses. Data was collected from 255 respondents via online messaging applications, and the questionnaire was administered via Google Form. This allowed regular monitoring and observing the consistency of responses and response rate. The instruments included a total of 20 internal communication construct items (with 5 items each for communication climate, quality and reliability of information, leadership communication, and two-way symmetrical communication), 13 items for employee engagement, and 5 items for two-way asymmetrical communication on a 6-point measurement scale. The questionnaire consisted of three sections testing respondents on demographic information, internal communication (IC), and employee engagement (EC). The questionnaire was adapted from Mbhele^[11], which is highly relevant to the variables tested in this study. The descriptive analysis employed SPSS vs27, and the constructed hypotheses were computed using SmartPLS software employing a partial least squares structural equation modelling approach.

4. Results and findings

4.1. Reliability and validity

Three different types of analysis were used to report this study's findings: the reliability and validity of the research, descriptive analysis and SEM for testing hypotheses. **Table 1** shows the Cronbach alpha scores

for all variables indicating high reliability above 0.7.

Table 1. Cronbach alpha’s value of reliability.

Variables	Cronbach’s alpha
Communication climate	0.915
Quality and reliability of information	0.915
Leadership communication	0.910
Two-way symmetrical communication	0.866
Employee engagement	0.944
Two-way asymmetrical communication	0.885

25 items of IC and 13 items of EC were tested on a 6-point scale and for the KMO validity test. **Tables 2 and 3** show that Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant for all constructs with a *p*-value of 0.000. The measure of sampling adequacy by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) for IC is 0.946, and EE is 0.939, indicating that the value has surpassed the recommended minimum value of 0.5.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett’s validity test (internal communication).

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.946
Bartlett’s test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	7115.284
	df	435
	Sig.	0.000

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett’s validity test (employee engagement).

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.939
Bartlett’s test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	2298.216
	df	78
	Sig.	0.000

4.2. Descriptive analysis of respondents’ demographic profile

Table 4 shows the demographic profile of 255 respondents who participated in this study.

Table 4. Respondents’ demographic profile.

Items	Categories	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Female	132	51.8
	Male	123	48.2
Age	20–30	101	39.6
	30–40	74	29
	40–50	50	19.6
	50 and above	30	11.8
	Malay	103	40.4
Race	Chinese	75	29.4
	Indian	74	29
	Other	3	1.2

Table 4. (Continued).

Items	Categories	Frequency	Per cent
Department	Finance	50	19.6
	Information Technology	51	20
	Human Resources	50	19.6
	Sales & Marketing	54	21.2
	Operation Management	50	19.6

Based on the descriptive analysis presented in **Table 4**, 51.8% (132) of respondents are males, while 48.2% (123) are females. The majority of respondents were between the age of 20–30 years (39.6%), followed by 30–40 years (29%) and 40–50 years (19.6%), and above 50 years (11.8%). The distribution of respondents based on their races was Malays (40.4%), Chinese (29.4%), Indians (29%), and others (1.2%). Finally, respondents from the following departments, namely Finance (19.6%), IT (20%), Human Resources (19.6%), Sales & Marketing (21.2%) and Operation Management (19.6%) were involved in this study.

4.3. Structural equation modelling

To explore the multivariate data relationships for the hypotheses, structural equation modelling was employed and assessing the measurement model to determine its convergent and discriminant validity. The relationship between the assessed indicators was investigated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (outer loadings).

The outer loadings and associations between the path coefficients were first calculated using the PLS-SEM technique in the structural model. Internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were the three key evaluation criteria to be satisfied. Several threshold values are acceptable; however, loading values of 0.7 or above were allowed for this investigation as long as the aggregate resulted in high loading values and AVE scores of 0.6^[34]. **Table 5** shows all six indicators, and their loading values have composite reliability (CR) of more than 0.7. The construct validity of the model was confirmed by the average variance extracted (AVE) with a minimum value of 0.646 and composite reliability (CR) of 0.886^[35]. The convergent validity was evaluated to see how well particular indicators represent a converging construct compared to other indicators measuring other constructs^[36]. The AVE cut-off was set at 0.50^[35,37]. The square root of the AVE of the construct should be greater than the correlation between that construct and other constructs in the model.

Table 5. Measurement model.

Factors	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Communication climate	CC1	0.815	0.906	0.66
	CC2	0.793		
	CC3	0.764		
	CC4	0.84		
	CC5	0.845		
Quality and Reliability of Information	QRI1	0.906	0.913	0.778
	QRI 2	0.865		
	QRI 3	0.875		
Leadership communication	LC1	0.906	0.909	0.77
	LC2	0.836		
	LC3	0.888		

Table 5. (Continued).

Factors	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Two-way symmetrical communication	TWSC1	0.849	0.886	0.722
	TWSC2	0.869		
	TWSC3	0.831		
Two-way asymmetrical communication	TWAC1	0.872	0.886	0.723
	TWAC2	0.813		
	TWAC3	0.864		
Employee engagement	EE1	0.764	0.936	0.646
	EE2	0.776		
	EE3	0.806		
	EE4	0.794		
	EE5	0.828		
	EE6	0.807		
	EE7	0.831		
	EE8	0.823		

Fornell and Larcker’s^[37] criterion was used to assess the discriminant validity. The results in **Table 6** show that all the variances extracted by the constructs (diagonal values) are more than the correlation coefficients between the constructs (off-diagonal values), indicating adequate discriminant validity.

Table 6. Discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Items	CC	EE	LC	QRI	TWAC	TWSC
CC	0.812					
EE	0.679	0.804				
LC	0.730	0.708	0.877			
QRI	0.754	0.702	0.750	0.882		
TWAC	-0.738	-0.762	-0.752	-0.756	0.850	
TWSC	0.590	0.713	0.702	0.714	-0.706	0.849

4.4. Structural model

Partial Least Squares structural equation modelling was used to test the hypotheses. First, the measurement model was tested for its convergent and discriminant validity, and then the structural model (**Figure 2**) was assessed to identify how well the variables are associated with one another.

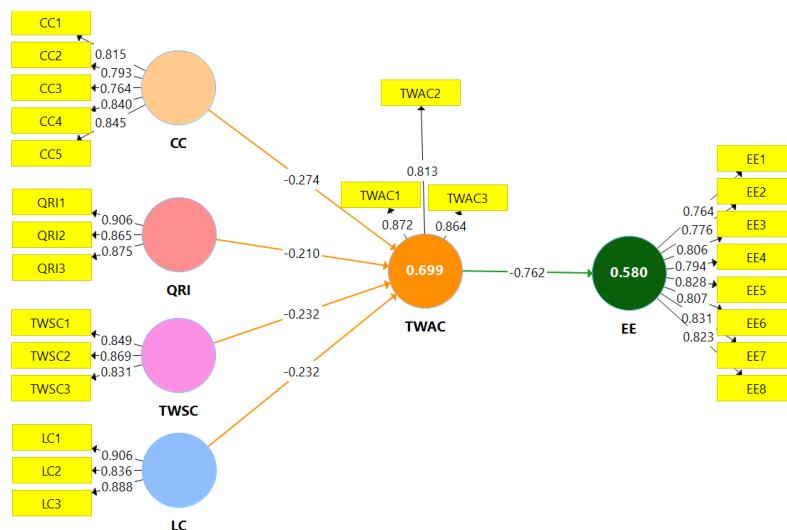


Figure 2. Modified structural model.

4.5. Hypotheses testing

The results of the direct relationships are presented in **Table 4**. The results show that all the four internal communication constructs have a significant positive relationship with employee engagement as the beta values are positive with *p*-values less than 0.05. Since the beta value is negative and the *p*-value less than 0.05, two-way asymmetrical communication has a significant negative relationship with employee engagement. The R^2 value for the model is 0.58, which means 58% of the variation in employee engagement can be explained by the variation in the internal communication constructs and two-way asymmetrical communication. The R^2 value of 0.58 is between 0.33 and 0.67, as suggested by Chin^[38], indicating a moderate model.

The results in **Table 7** further indicate a significant negative relationship between the four internal communication factors and the two-way asymmetrical communication. The R^2 value for this model is 0.699, which implies that the four internal communication constructs can explain approximately 70% of the variation in two-way asymmetrical communication. The R^2 value of 0.699 is more than 0.67, indicating a substantial model as suggested by Chin^[38]. The two Q^2 values for employee engagement (0.37) and two-way asymmetrical communication (0.483) are more than 0, indicating that the model has sufficient predictive relevance.

Table 7. Hypotheses testing results-direct effects.

Relationship	Std. beta	Std. error	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Decision	R^2	Q^2	VIF
CC → EE	0.208	0.072	2.890	0.002	supported	0.580	0.370	2.704
QRI → EE	0.160	0.078	2.060	0.048	supported			3.347
TWSC → EE	0.177	0.062	2.852	0.037	supported			3.347
LC → EE	0.177	0.086	2.067	0.005	supported			3.030
TWAC → EE	-0.762	0.031	24.959	0.000	supported			1.000
CC → TWAC	-0.274	0.092	2.975	0.002	supported	0.699	0.483	2.704
QRI → TWAC	-0.210	0.102	2.067	0.036	supported			3.347
TWSC → TWAC	-0.232	0.079	2.924	0.004	supported			3.030
LC → TWAC	-0.232	0.112	2.067	0.047	supported			3.347

The results of the mediation analysis are presented in **Table 8**. The bootstrapping analysis in **Table 5** shows that all the four indirect effects (β 0.208, β 0.160, β 0.177 and β 0.177) of the four constructs of internal communication are significant with the *t* value of 2.890, 2.060, 2.852, 2.067 respectively and the *p*-values less than 0.05. 95% bootstrapping CI bias corrected (BC) as displayed for all the constructs (LL = 0.072, UL = 0.348; LL = 0.005, UL = 0.295; LL = 0.046, UL = 0.281; LL = 0.008, UL = 0.340), do not straddle a 0 which indicates that there is a mediation^[39], and it is statistically significant.

Table 8. Hypotheses testing—mediation effects.

Relationship	Std. beta	Std. error	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Confidence interval (BC)		Decision
					LL	UL	
CC → TWAC → EE	0.208	0.072	2.890	0.002	0.072	0.348	supported
QRI → TWAC → EE	0.160	0.078	2.060	0.037	0.005	0.295	supported
TWSC → TWAC → EE	0.177	0.062	2.852	0.005	0.046	0.281	supported
LC → TWAC → EE	0.177	0.086	2.067	0.048	0.008	0.340	supported

Hence, we can conclude from all the above findings that employee engagement increases with increased internal communication. However, two-way asymmetrical communication negatively impacts internal

communication constructs and employee engagement. Therefore, internal communication can be used as a predictive factor to assess employee engagement. Moreover, the VIF values for all the relationships were found to be below the threshold value of 5^[35]. Since the values are far below the critical levels, this model can be used for estimating the PLS path model for employee engagement.

5. Discussion

Communication is a key component of internal organisational communication, and it has been associated with beneficial organisational and employee outcomes^[22]. Internal communication at all levels of an organisation is pivotal in stimulating productivity and sustaining positive working relationships^[40]. On the other hand, employee engagement increases employee productivity, organisational performance, strategic management, and competitive edge^[23,41]. Job satisfaction, job commitment, career satisfaction, and work motivation are all concepts that are related to employee engagement. Osborne and Hammoud^[42] suggested communication to enhance employee engagement. Hence, this study identified the relationship between internal communication factors and employee engagement.

The study's outcomes demonstrated a significantly positive relationship between communication climate and employee engagement, which is critical for retaining employee commitment^[25]. The communication context and consistent flow of honest communication developed within the organisation ensure employees are valuable and encourage them to openly and actively share their ideas to achieve organisational goals. Like Mbhele^[11] and Karanges et al.^[22], this study's findings also established a positive and significant correlation between the quality and reliability of information and employee engagement. Quality of information refers to employees' sense of relevance to the information received, good knowledge of the communication climate in their organisations, source of information, and credibility of the channel used for communication enhances the information reliability^[11]. On the other hand, if employees perceive the information as inaccurate, they will rely on information from their colleagues to keep themselves updated, which can reversely impact their organisational performance and staff development. This study found that two-way symmetrical communication also demonstrated a positive correlation with employee engagement. Organisational communication culture favours two-way symmetrical communication and promotes interactive and persuasive communication. Its success is determined by good understanding achieved by both parties, not necessarily by the number of viewpoints changed. Hence, higher symmetrical communication promotes mutual benefit rather than influence^[27]. Therefore, the findings ascertain that higher symmetrical communication fosters a feeling of belonging in employees and creates a win-win situation for both employers and employees^[11]. Finally, leadership communication and employee engagement are also positively and significantly correlated. Higher leadership communication means a better bond, understanding and trust between the leadership and employees^[43]. Hence, Muhamedi and Ariffin^[44] recommended management or leaders should regularly interact with employees to feel more invested in the assigned tasks and the organisation. This also ensures everyone has a shared purpose and interest in achieving the organisation's vision^[11,28].

This study also tested the mediating role of two-way asymmetrical communication between all the four internal communication constructs and employee engagement. This construct is precisely the opposite of two-way symmetrical communication. The sender's sole intention is to win over the other party and put forward their interest over the interest of others^[27]. Hence, asymmetrical communication influences others and prioritises the organisation's requirements over the employees. Based on this study's results, it negatively impacts employee engagement but significantly mediates the relationship between all the independent and dependent variables, as claimed by Mbhele^[11]. Hence, all the hypotheses of this study stand supported.

Our study, which is based on recent studies by Men et al.^[5], Sun et al.^[7], and Nguyen and Ha^[26],

emphasizes the significance of internal communication in determining employee engagement in Malaysia's e-commerce industry. Further evidence for the significance of fostering effective communication practices within organisations originates from the positive relationships observed between communication climate, quality and reliability of information, two-way symmetrical communication, and leadership communication with employee engagement^[40]. Our findings highlight the need of encouraging an open and transparent communication environment, as recommended by Men et al.^[5]. This environment ensures understand their contributions matter and that their perspectives are actively sought after, which fosters a sense of loyalty and commitment within the organisation. Additionally, analogous to Nguyen and Ha's research^[26], there is a positive relationship between information quality and reliability of information with employee engagement, which emphasizes the need to provide employees with accurate and relevant information.

Practically stating, organisations looking to increase employee engagement should prioritize building open and honest communication environments, providing trustworthy information, encouraging two-way symmetrical dialogue, and enhancing leadership communication. Organisations can create an environment where employees feel valued, engaged, and motivated to contribute to the success of the firm by observing these tenets. In line with the studies of Men et al.^[5], Sun et al.^[7] and Kang and Sung^[45], our research adds to the body of knowledge by elucidating the nuanced relationship between internal communication and employee engagement. Our research provides firms looking to maximize the engagement and productivity of their workforce with practical data. To improve the generalizability of these results and offer a more comprehensive understanding of this crucial relationship, we advise future investigation in different organisational contexts and businesses.

6. Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, internal communication has a crucial role in achieving employee engagement. It gives Malaysian businesses additional information and resources on organisational communication and employee engagement. The study findings help higher management and employers recognise the need to develop and execute strong internal communication to increase employee engagement. It is believed that effective internal communication leads to increased productivity. This study included five constructs which were not previously used in the Malaysian context. Although employee engagement and internal communication variables show favourable relationships in the study, it's crucial to remember that correlation does not imply causation. Future studies should investigate causal relationships to understand the impacts of enhanced internal communication on employee engagement. The study's conclusions may not be universally applicable or generalised to other contexts because they are context-specific to an organisation, organisation size, and cultural characteristics that may affect the observed connections. Although the study indicates that two-way asymmetrical communication mediates the relationship between internal communication constructs and employee engagement, it doesn't go into detail the processes and underlying factors which could be explored in future studies.

Based on the study's conclusions, organisations must prioritise effective internal communication to increase employee engagement. Organisations can use this to their advantage by enhancing leadership communication, transparent channels of communication, and communication training to increase employee engagement. Organisations may tailor their communication strategy by being aware of the communication factors studies here that affect employee engagement. The importance of leaders effectively connecting with people is emphasized by the positive association between leadership communication and employee engagement. Organisations should encourage leadership to engage with employees frequently to build trust and achieve shared goals.

The study's concept may be used to increase employee engagement in both the corporate and government sectors. In addition, this research has suggested methodologies and frameworks for improving internal communication and employee engagement. This study strengthens the validity of the ideas employed from a theoretical perspective. Future studies could employ mixed methods as qualitative data might uncover fresh information about employee expectations. This study ascertains the claim made by previous researchers that employee engagement rapidly declines owing to inadequate organisational communication. This extends beyond employee satisfaction, and the typical satisfaction measurements must be updated to incorporate employee engagement scales.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, KB; methodology, KB; software, AA; validation, KB and AA; formal analysis, AA; investigation, MDRR; resources, MDRR; data curation, AA and MDRR; writing—original draft preparation, KB; writing—review and editing, KB, AA and MDRR; visualization, AA; supervision, KB; project administration, KB. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Department of Statistics, Malaysia. Available online: https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemebByCat&cat=394&bul_id=em1vRTNvcWVqcVQwTXd6dk5Dc2kwdz09&menu_id=b0pIV1E3RW40VWRTUkZocEhyZ1pLUT09 (accessed on 30 November 2023).
2. Madan S, Pérez-Morón J, Chua XN, et al. Analysis of the Shopee's Strategies to Succeed in the Global E-commerce Market: Malaysia Case. *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality in Asia Pasific*. 2022, 5(1). doi: 10.32535/ijthap.v5i1.1400
3. Malaysia eCommerce: Most popular international e-commerce sites 2022. Statista. Available online: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1012711/malaysia-leading-b2c-e-commerce-sites-international/> (accessed on 7 June 2023).
4. Krywalski Santiago J. The influence of internal communication satisfaction on employees' organisational identification: Effect of perceived organisational support. *Journal of Economics and Management*. 2020, 42: 70-98. doi: 10.22367/jem.2020.42.04
5. Men LR, Neill M, Yue CA. Examining the effects of symmetrical internal communication and employee engagement on organizational change outcomes. *Public Relations Journal*. 2020, 13(4), 1-19.
6. Bao LH, Mohd Arif LS, Omar R, Shaari R. The relationship between internal communication and employee engagement at favourite design. *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*. 2020, 18(1).
7. Sun R, Li JYQ, Lee Y, et al. The Role of Symmetrical Internal Communication in Improving Employee Experiences and Organizational Identification During COVID-19 Pandemic-Induced Organizational Change. *International Journal of Business Communication*. 2021, 60(4): 1398-1426. doi: 10.1177/23294884211050628
8. Špoljarić A, Tkalac Verčič A. Internal communication satisfaction and employee engagement as determinants of the employer brand. *Journal of Communication Management*. 2021, 26(1): 130-148. doi: 10.1108/jcom-01-2021-0011
9. Markos S, Gossaye B. The effect of internal communication on employee engagement: Empirical evidence from commercial Bank of Ethiopia. *International Journal of information, Business and management*. 2021, 13(2), 47-71.
10. Shaheen S, Zulfiqar S, Saleem S, et al. Does Organizational Cronyism Lead to Lower Employee Performance? Examining the Mediating Role of Employee Engagement and Moderating Role of Islamic Work Ethics. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2020, 11. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.579560
11. Mbhele S. Internal communication in achieving employee engagement within a South African government department [PhD thesis]. University of Pretoria; 2016.
12. Chanana N, Sangeeta. Employee engagement practices during COVID-19 lockdown. *Journal of Public Affairs*. 2020, 21(4). doi: 10.1002/pa.2508
13. Sutton LBM, Le Roux T, Fourie LM. Internal communication in a diverse and developing world context: Challenges for corporate South Africa. *Communicare: Journal for Communication Studies in Africa*. 2022, 41(2): 90-102. doi: 10.36615/jcsa.v41i2.1452

14. Balakrishnan K, Harji MB, Angusamy A. Determinants of Multicultural Identity for Well-Being and Performance. *Asian Journal of Social Science*. 2020, 48(5-6): 488-512. doi: 10.1163/15685314-04805015
15. Balakrishnan K, Harji MB, Angusamy A. Intercultural Communication Competence: Well-being and Performance of Multicultural Teams. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*. 2022, 21(2): 82-96. doi: 10.36923/jicc.v21i2.16
16. Chmielecki M. Factors Influencing Effectiveness of Internal Communication. *Management and Business Administration, Central Europe*. 2015, 23(2): 24-38. doi: 10.7206/mba.ce.2084-3356.139
17. Ellenkamp JJH, Brouwers EPM, Embregts PJCM, et al. Work Environment-Related Factors in Obtaining and Maintaining Work in a Competitive Employment Setting for Employees with Intellectual Disabilities: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*. 2015, 26(1): 56-69. doi: 10.1007/s10926-015-9586-1
18. Freeman RE. *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Boston: Pitman; 1984.
19. de Beer E, Rensburg R. Towards a theoretical framework for the governing of stakeholder relationships: a perspective from South Africa. *Journal of Public Affairs*. 2011, 11(4): 208-225. doi: 10.1002/pa.414
20. Harley MB. *An Investigation Exploring the Drivers of Employee Engagement: A United States Customs and Border Protection Perspective [PhD thesis]*. Dublin, National College of Ireland; 2019.
21. Cropanzano R, Anthony EL, Daniels SR, et al. Social Exchange Theory: A Critical Review with Theoretical Remedies. *Academy of Management Annals*. 2017, 11(1): 479-516. doi: 10.5465/annals.2015.0099
22. Karanges E, Johnston K, Beatson A, et al. The influence of internal communication on employee engagement: A pilot study. *Public Relations Review*. 2015, 41(1): 129-131. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.12.003
23. Iddagoda YA, Opatha HHDNP. Identified Research Gaps in Employee Engagement. *International Business Research*. 2016, 10(2): 63. doi: 10.5539/ibr.v10n2p63
24. Manoli AE, Hodgkinson IR. Exploring internal organisational communication dynamics in the professional football industry. *European Journal of Marketing*. 2021, 55(11): 2894-2916. doi: 10.1108/ejm-05-2019-0422
25. Jaupi F, Llaci S. The Impact of Communication Satisfaction and Demographic Variables on Employee Engagement. *Journal of Service Science and Management*. 2015, 8(2): 191-200. doi: 10.4236/jssm.2015.82021
26. Nguyen CMA, Ha MT. The interplay between internal communication, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and employee loyalty in higher education institutions in Vietnam. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*. 2023, 10(1). doi: 10.1057/s41599-023-01806-8
27. Willacy M. Two-Way Symmetric Communication Between Public Utilities and the Public. Available online: <https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/td/1234> (accessed on 30 November 2023).
28. Scherrer L. *Leadership communication and employee engagement*. Gonzaga University; 2016.
29. Babbie E, Mouton J. *The Practice of Social Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2015
30. Queirós A, Faria D, Almeida F. Strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research methods. *European Journal of Education Studies*. 2017.
31. Sharma G. Pros and cons of different sampling techniques. *International Journal of Applied Research*. 2017, 3(7), 749-752.
32. Fugard AJB, Potts HWW. Supporting thinking on sample sizes for thematic analyses: a quantitative tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 2015, 18(6): 669-684. doi: 10.1080/13645579.2015.1005453
33. Faul F, Erdfelder E, Lang AG, Buchner A. G* Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior research methods*. 2007, 39(2): 175-191.
34. Byrne BM. *Structural Equation Modeling with Mplus*. Routledge; 2013. doi: 10.4324/9780203807644
35. Hair JF, Hauff S, Hult GTM, et al. *A Primer on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM)*: Sage Publications. 2017. doi: 10.15358/9783800653614
36. Urbach N, Ahlemann F. Structural equation modeling in information systems research using partial least squares. *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application*. 2010, 11(2): 5-40.
37. Fornell C, Larcker DF. Evaluating Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error. *Journal of Marketing Research*. 1981, 18(1): 39-50. doi: 10.1177/002224378101800104
38. Chin WW. The partial least squares approach to structural equation modelling. In: Marcoulides G (editor). *Modern Methods for Business Research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 1998. pp.295-336.
39. Preacher KJ, Hayes AF. *Assessing mediation in communication research*. London: The Sage sourcebook of advanced data analysis methods for communication research; 2008.
40. Markos S, Gossaye B. The effect of internal communication on employee engagement: Empirical evidence from commercial Bank of Ethiopia. *International Journal of information, Business and management*. 2021, 13(2): 47-71.
41. Holá J, Pikhart M. The implementation of internal communication system as a way to company efficiency. *E+M Ekonomie a Management*. 2014, XVII(2): 161-169. doi: 10.15240/tul/001/2014-2-012
42. Osborne S, Hammoud MS. Effective employee engagement in the workplace. *International Journal of Applied Management and Technology*. 2017,16(1): 4. doi: 10.5590/IJAMT.2017.16.1.04
43. Southwick SM, Southwick FS. The Loss of Social Connectedness as a Major Contributor to Physician Burnout. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2020, 77(5): 449. doi: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2019.4800

44. Muhamedi M, Ariffin MYM. Importance of communication channels between managers and employees' in management communication. *The Social Sciences*. 2017. doi: 10.36478/sscience.2017.1541.1552
45. Kang M, Sung M. How symmetrical employee communication leads to employee engagement and positive employee communication behaviors: The mediation of employee-organization relationships. *Journal of Communication Management*. 2017, 21(1): 82-102. doi: 10.1108/JCOM-04-2016-0026